DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 476 681 JC 030 289

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TITLE	Community College Presidency: What Are the Challenges To Be Encountered and Traits To Be Successful?
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	20p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Presidents; Community Colleges; Educational Change ; Futures (of Society); *Leaders; *Leadership; *Leadership Qualities; *Leadership Styles; Leadership Training; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

This study highlights many of the unique challenges the 21st century will pose for those who aspire to be community college presidents. Specifically, the author summarizes Sullivan's (2001) list of 21st century challenges (e.g., a continuing scarcity of resources, changing student and staff demographics, and competition from private-sector providers of high-quality training) and discusses the relevance of these issues for the next generation of community college leaders. The author asserts that knowing and understanding these emerging challenges will aid the community college president in goal accomplishment within his or her institution. The leadership skills and traits needed by the 21st century community college president are also reviewed. The author summarizes previous research on essential community college leadership traits and behavior patterns and gives special attention to the leadership traits of African-American and female leaders. The author concludes with the assertion that the community college president must have the skills necessary to ensure success during his or her presidency. Leadership skills and traits will need to be developed as the future community college president transitions from faculty, department chair, dean, vice president, and provost into the presidency. (Contains 16 references.) (RC)

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ED 476 681

Community College Presidency:

What Are the Challenges to be Encountered and Traits to be Successful?

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Community College Presidency:

What Are the Challenges to be Encountered and Traits to be Successful?

Abstract

This study will highlight many of the unique challenges the 21st century will impose for those who aspire to be community college presidents. The higher education landscape is changing in the new millennium. Knowledge and understanding of the challenges and hurdles will aid the community college president in goal accomplishment within his or her institution. The leadership skills and traits needed by the 21st century community college president will also be reviewed. The community college president must have the necessary skills to ensure success during his or her presidency. Leadership skills and traits will need to be developed as the future community college president transitions from faculty, department chair, dean, vice president, and provost into the presidency.

Community College Presidency:

What Are the Challenges to be Encountered and Traits to be Successful?

Introduction

When starting on a difficult journey, one must be properly outfitted to survive and conquer the challenges of the arduous trip. The arduous trip described in this paper is one that the community college president will encounter during his or her presidency. The pathway to community college leadership has many challenges and requires special skills and traits to succeed. The traveler must have fortitude and drive required to meet the many challenges encountered during the journey. The traveler will require a full knapsack of special skills and traits needed for the trip. Once the trip is complete, additional skills will be required to meet the current and future challenges presented to a community college president. What are the hurdles and challenges that one will encounter during the trip? What traits and skills are needed to be developed and refined to ensure a successful endeavor? This paper will attempt to answer those major questions and describe the pathway to being a community college president.

The common wisdom is that leadership is an art and not a science. How does one learn the art of leadership? Every young military officer soon learns upon entry into the United States military, the art of leadership can be learned, practiced, and refined. The study, analysis, and professional discussions about leadership are key to understanding the necessary skills and traits needed by the community college president. Resources such as money, time, and facilities require management skills to ensure productivity. Hockaday and Puyear (2000) indicate that there are more than 125 definitions of leadership. Leadership, as described in *Community College Leadership in the New Millennium*, is "simply holding the goals of the institution in one hand and the people of the institution in the other and somehow bringing these two together in a common good" (p. 3). The community college president requires the leadership skills needed to lead people to achieve common goals and produce success as he or she faces the new millennium challenges.

Challenges and Hurdles Encountered by the Community College President

Community college presidents and those in the making will need to understand and be experienced in dealing with leadership hurdles. The millennium will bring new challenges along with the old. Community college presidents will need to be successful in handling these 21st century challenges to ensure the vitality and continued success of the community college system within the United States. Those faculty members, deans, vice presidents, and provosts on the pathway to being community college presidents will need to identify, gain skills to deal with the challenges, and operate within an ever-changing environment.

Past community college presidents have had unique challenges and environments in which they had to be successful. Sullivan (2001) identified the four generations of community college leaders as: "the founding fathers, the good managers, the collaborators, and the millennium generation" (p. 559). Each generation had major responsibilities during the 100 years of development of American community college structure. The founding fathers generation was responsible for the initial development of the new postsecondary education system in America. The good managers were responsible for the rapid growth and management of vast resources infused into the community colleges. The collaborators developed strong teams of the faculty, staff, and administrators in order to bring together scarce resources to ensure student access to higher education.

The millennium generation of community college presidents will be required to redefine the role of the community college president to meet the new challenges. They will need to be dealmakers and coalition builders within the changing environment. The 21st century challenges, as characterized by Sullivan (2001), are:

- a continuing scarcity of resources;
- changing student and staff demographics;
- a shift in emphasis from teaching to student learning and learning outcomes assessment;

- technological developments that absorb an increasing proportion of the operating budget, challenge traditional instructional methods, and require significant retraining of staff and faculty members;
- increasing regulation by external agencies and demands for shared governance from internal constituents;
- public skepticism about their ability to meet the learning needs of contemporary consumers;
- competition from private-sector providers of high-quality training;
- blurring of service boundaries as a result of distance learning and Internet use;
- reduced emphasis on degree completion and growing interest in other forms of credentialing; and
- finally, a nearly unbearable barrage of information. (pp. 559-560)

The tests of the 21st century listed above do not have proven solutions or answers. The list provides a good view into the 21st century educational environment and the possible hurdles to be encountered. The community college president must assess his or her particular situation, environment, and available resources to form an appropriate response to the challenges that Sullivan has provided. The success of the response will depend on the skills and traits the community college president has in dealing with the challenges.

Hockaday and Puyear (2000) also present many of the new hurdles that the community college president will encounter in the new decade. Those challenges are: "relevance in a global economy, new competition and the move toward privatization, distance education, competency-based programs, mission boundaries blurred, and new funding challenges " (pp. 6-7). The global economy requires community colleges to look beyond district boundaries and offer international programs that will ensure district competition within the global market place. Stronger competition from private colleges and universities and the use of distance education has forced community colleges to offer competitive programs and divert scarce resources to maintain

relevance in the educational marketplace. With the trend toward competency-based programs demanded by employers and state governance bodies, the community college president must establish mechanisms to ensure and maintain compliance. The programs offered by the community college must meet the corporate and governmental expectations needed in the workforce. The blurring of mission boundaries and mission creep with funding issues creates a severe impact on the college's ability to meet expectations. Additional missions with fewer funding resources create a constant struggle for the community college president to resolve.

Cohen and Brawer (1996) also present insight into the hurdles to be faced by the community college president, offering a general list of the trends, challenges, and obligations. The authors indicate that new community college presidents must have a basic understanding of the economy, demographics, and public attitudes toward education. The economy should supply sufficient resources for educational opportunities to educate the youth of America and continue lifelong learning for its citizens. According to Cohen and Brawer, the demographics of the community college students will continue to support the need for career, collegiate, developmental, and continuing education opportunities. Public attitudes toward education will be based on colleges providing a route for personal advancement. If the colleges fail to convince the public that education provides upward mobility, then other funding priorities may displace education. The community colleges must continue to serve as the feeder to universities, and offer programs such as remedial education, developmental programs, workforce programs, and continuing education to maintain public support. The authors did not project a major change in the economy, demographics, or public attitudes toward education. Cohen and Brawer indicate that state financing will provide the bulk of funding support for community colleges in the near future.

In today's world of a potential recession with reductions to the tax base, public financing of educational services provided by the community colleges may be reduced. Reduced funding could affect the college's ability to provide remedial education, developmental programs,

workforce programs, and continuing education. The lack of educational services and support to meet the needs of the community could severely affect public attitudes toward higher education. Community colleges will need to develop alternative funding sources through foundations, donations, and grants to maintain current educational programs and to expand services.

Other impacts offered by Cohen and Brawer (1996) include a slow growth in student admissions, slow growth in faculty, changes in governance, financing, instruction and curriculum, and need to adjust organizational structures. Community college growth will occur in both eighteen-year-olds and mature adults seeking education as a way to improve their quality of life. The community colleges will need to also accommodate a growth in minority students. A large need for faculty replacements will occur in the early part of the millennium due to retirements. However, the growth in the actual numbers will correspond to the student growth. Changes in governance will continue to be made with the desire to ensure state and local governance agencies can influence quality of instruction and accountability of community college performance. The authors also indicate instruction and curriculum will remain oriented on collegiate and general education programs that transfer to the university with a growth in workforce and technical programs. Career education, developmental education, community education, collegiate, and general education will still be the focus of the community college curriculum in the near term. Electronic methods of instruction, such as multimedia, interactive media, and distance learning will continue to supplement classroom-centered instruction, not replace it. Cohen and Brawer have presented an accurate view of the educational environment community colleges will encounter in the new century.

Organizational restructuring is also a real or perceived need by the new community college president to meet his or her leadership and management requirements. The organizational structure tends to be re-crafted when a new community college president arrives in the position. Underwood and Hammons (1999) contend that the incoming community college president will have to manage organizational changes within the community college. The

author's research indicates that the leadership style of the new president will require a restructuring of the college organization to meet his or her requirements. The data presented by Underwood and Hammons indicates 71 percent of incoming community college presidents made organizational adjustments and changes within the first year of their presidency. There are constant changes and readjustments to the organization approximately every 24 months. The authors also indicate that 84 percent of the nation's 1,100 plus community colleges review the organizational structure annually, with 77 percent making changes to the structure every 24 months. This constant changing of the community college organizational structure is a major challenge for the community college president and the college itself.

Minority candidates for community college president face additional challenges in obtaining the position. Chenoweth (1998) indicates that the number of African American community college presidents during the 1990s has declined. Evelyn (1998) indicates that community colleges have failed to include minorities in community college leadership roles. Evelyn illustrates her point by quoting statistics indicating that only 64 of the 1,200 two-year institutions have African American presidents. Evelyn alleges that a barrier to African American candidates is the predominantly White board of trustees who approve the presidents. Evelyn also illustrates the point that white male presidents tend to remain in office for 11.2 years, minority males for 8.7 years, and minority women for 4.0 years. Stephenson (2001) sees women leaders "at a difficult crossroads, a crossroads where public expectations, the demands of diverse population, governmental scrutiny, and harsh financial realities intersect" (p. 193).

The community college itself can pose challenges that can be overwhelming for a new president. According to Alfred and Rosevear (2000), the community colleges are "slow-moving, change-resistant organizations with static organizational structures and systems-driven management" (p. 2). The static organizational structure portion of this quote contradicts the data presented by Underwood and Hammons (1999). The organizational structures of community colleges tend to be in constant transition and change. However, slow-moving and resistant to

change is alive and well in community colleges according to the authors. Alfred and Rosevear indicate "institutions cannot get to the long term in one jump. The goal should be to understand what relatively small things they have to do this year that will have enormous implications for the future" (p. 27).

I would offer that the community college cannot make rapid changes due to the collective resistance to change and the "collegial" structure. The internal inertia requires unique strategies to counteract. The community college president must develop and implement unique strategies to ensure goal accomplishment. The internal operation of the community college indicates that it starts slow, continues at a slow pace, and cannot be stopped or change direction very quickly. Alfred and Rosevear (2000) indicate that patience and persistence are needed traits of the community college president to overcome resistance to change. The community college is like the tortoise, not the hare. This resistance to change, I suspect, is prevalent in all higher education institutions.

Traits Needed by the Community College President to be Successful

There is no common agreement on the leadership skills and traits needed to be a community college president. Though much research has been conducted as to the required skills and leadership traits for a community college president, there appears to be limited consensus. Leadership research has presented traits, habits, hints, factors, themes, types, and change agents needed by the community college president. The fog of the research on what traits and skills are required by the community college president has made the pathway to the presidency multiple-choice. The research of Alfred and Rosevear, 2000; Covey, 1989; Evans, 2001; Garmon, 2001; Giannini, 2001; Hockaday and Puyear, 2000; McFarlin, Crittenden, and Ebbers, 1999; Oakley and Krug, 1994; Phelps, Taber, and Smith, 1997; Pielstick, 1998; and Stephenson, 2001 provides ample information on leadership traits and skills. As one travels the path to the presidency, numerous skills and traits will need to be developed. Many authors have conducted research to identify leadership traits and skills required to be a successful community

college president. What follows is an examination of some of the research available on traits and skills needed by community college leaders.

In a report to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), Hockaday and Puyear (2000) provided a list of nine traits needed by the effective community college president. Those nine traits are: "vision; integrity; confidence; courage; technical knowledge; collaborators, persistence; good judgment; and the desire to lead" (pp. 3-5). The authors have suggested that the potential community college president should develop and hone these nine traits as they travel along the pathway to the presidency.

According to Alfred and Rosevear's (2000) theoretical framework, several leadership traits and skills to be developed by community college leaders are "teamwork, information sharing, core competency focus, customer service emphasis, and market foresight" (pp. 3-7). Alfred and Rosevear also indicated that these traits should be developed as the community college leader moves through the academic structure of faculty, department chair, dean, vice president, and provost. By the time the individual reaches the presidency, the seven traits must be sufficiently developed to provide a firm base upon which to lead.

Covey (1989) describes seven habits of highly effective people that can be important for a community college president. The seven traits are: "be proactive, begin with an end in mind, put first things first, think win-win; seek first to understand, then to be understood; synergize, and sharpen the saw" (p. inside cover). Most community college presidents should want to be highly effective leaders and should implement and practice the seven habits. Mr. Covey's list of habits is also different from the two previous research findings.

When Garmon (2001) accepted the presidency of a community college, many well-wishers offered 66 helpful hints that would help him lead his college. The list of suggestions included advice on practicing humility, picking your battles, instilling a sense of pride, and trusting your intuition. Garmon summarized the 66 helpful suggestions into the following statement:

> What matters most is open, honest, accurate communication, with a good dose of common sense, lots of willingness to trust and constant dedication to the success of students and those who serve students. Above all, the community college is a learning-centered organization. This means that its success has to be the primary business of everyone involved in giving strength to the college community and to supporting faculty and staff. (p. 10)

The focus of 66 helpful hints was on actions to be taken by the community college president while executing the authority of the office. The summation provided by Garmon provided additional community college leadership traits for consideration.

McFarlin, Crittenden, and Ebbers (1999) listed nine factors that community college presidents possess based on a survey conducted in 1998. The survey instrument was mailed to 975 presidents of public two-year colleges with 718 returned responses. The results of the survey provided nine common factors of a community college president. The common factors are: "possession of an earned doctorate degree, specific study of community college leadership, personal research and publication agenda, preparation as a change agent, status as community college insider, mentor-protégé relationship, peer networks, leadership development activities, and knowledge of technology" (p. 20). The list of leadership traits and skills of a community college president continues to grow.

In a meta-ethnographic study by Pielstick (1998), seven major community college leadership themes and patterns were provided. The seven leadership themes are: "creating a vision, communicating the vision, building relationships, developing a supporting organizational culture, guiding implementation, exhibiting character, and achieving results" (p. 15). The author also pointed out that the leader had to create and sustain a supportive culture of understanding and confidence within the community college to overcome obstacles.

Oakley and Krug (1994) presented two extreme types of leaders, the reactive and the creative leader. The reactive leader makes all decisions personally, pushes the organization for

results, is highly opinionated, and afraid of losing control. The creative leader empowers people to make decisions, pulls the organization toward a vision, is open-minded, and relaxes control to obtain results. The reactive leader is oriented toward the problem and symptoms instead of discovering the cause of the problem. The creative leader is oriented on solutions that nurture ownership by the team members.

Phelps, Taber, and Smith's (1997) research on the African-American community college president presents additional insight to the leadership traits of the minority leader. The authors' state:

> Presidents of a minority racial, ethnic, or gender group may also provide inspiring role models for students, employees, and community residents; add important voices to dialogues concerning personnel issues, including staff development, curriculum changes, teaching excellence, and student success; and promote community relationships ad commitments, enriching all associated with the college and its community. (p 3)

The research data provided by the authors at the time of their study indicated that 5% of the community college presidents were African-American and that 31% of those were women.

The literature on community college leadership presents additional traits needed by women community college presidents. Three prominent women leaders provided comments based on experiences acquired as a community college president. Evans (2001) argues that women leaders are "not so bound by tradition nor enamored with power and the trappings of office; they are outcome-oriented and very caring. They are "can do" people, who take on challenges others shun" (p. 181). Giannini (2001) sees women community college leaders as responsive change agents guiding the future agendas of higher education. Stephenson (2001) challenges woman leaders to understand staffing, students, funding and the workforce.

Conclusion

The challenges provided by the many authors in section two, offer an excellent insight to the community college leadership environment for the 21st century. The ability to deal with

many new and varied challenges requires an agile leader who is thoroughly prepared through training, experience, and self-study. The movement through the community college hierarchy from faculty to president may provide the necessary opportunities to develop and refine leadership techniques to deal with the new millennium challenges. The future leader must make every effort to learn from their experiences and those of others in order to develop and refine needed leadership skills and traits. Leadership training within higher education needs more focus and emphasis to prepare future leaders. With the impending turn-over of community college leaders due to retirements, leadership training is more important now that has been in the past. Formal and informal training programs should be in place now to assist leadership development of those individual just starting up the ladder to the community college presidency. The United States military for centuries has provided extensive and continuous leadership training through formal training and education, on the job training, and coaching and mentoring. During a career in the military, a leader will spend at least two plus years in formal education learning and practicing leadership skills. The only job responsibilities the military leader has is to be in school learning leadership skills and traits. The community college president must assess his or her particular situation, environment, and available resources to form an appropriate response to the challenges. The ability of the community college leader to understand the many new challenges, formulate strategies for dealing with the challenges, communicating the strategies, and succeeding in overcoming the challenges, will enhance the institution they lead. To operate a community college that meets all stakeholders' requirements within the current environment will be the measure of success for the community college president.

The literature in community college leadership has provided many traits, habits, hints, factors, themes, and types needed by the community college president as shown in Table 1. The list of traits provided is comprehensive and diverse. The gaining and refining the required leadership traits is accomplished by the matriculation through various leadership positions within the community college. Can a community college president have all the traits and skills that the

research has provided? Will having all the traits ensure success as a community college president?

The answer to these questions is no, and can not be found in the literature. It is found within community college presidents as they conduct self-assessments of their leadership traits and skills. It is not possible for any community college president to have all of the skills and traits that I have outlined in this paper, and there are even more listed in the study of leadership that I did not present. The community college leader must capitalize on those skills that make them effective in creating a high performance educational institution. The skills that the leader assess as weak or needs further development must be improved through on the job training, study, or mentoring. The leader may also compensate with highly developed skills to offset those that are not well developed. If the leader does take this strategy, then he or she must have sufficient understanding of how to compensate and still met performance expectations. The leader may also consider using trusted staff to complement his leadership skills in needed areas. I would argue that the community college leader should play to their strengths and offset the shortfalls through continued leadership study and training, and have trusted staff to assist in those areas the leader deems needing support. Success as a community college president is not measured by traits or skills. It is measured by how one applies the skills to the task. Success is also measured by the many stakeholders of the community college who evaluate the leader's performance. The final review of success is conducted by the governance board that does the hiring and firing.

The challenges that the 21st century community college president will encounter will require unique skills and talents. The list of traits, habits, hints, factors, themes, and types needed by the community college president is quite extensive. It begs the question of how one individual can obtain and master all the traits provided in the literature. What if a community college president has all the traits, will he or she be a successful community college president? What if the president only has 75 % or 50 % of the listed traits? Can success as a community

college president be measured by the leadership traits one possesses? Certainly, one must develop and refine leadership traits as he or she transitions from faculty to president. Few community college presidents, if any, have every leadership trait presented in this paper. The skill in applying the leadership traits one possesses is the yardstick to measure success as a community college president. Applying leadership skills and traits to the task is truly an art, not a science.

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Table 1

List of Leadership Traits and Skills by Authors

Authors	Traits And Skills
Alfred and Rosevear (2000)	Teamwork, Information Sharing, Core Competency Focus, Customer Service Emphasis, and Market Foresight.
Covey (1989)	Be Proactive, Begin with an End in Mind, Put First Things First, Think Win-Win, Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood, Synergize, and Sharpen the Saw.
Evans (2001)	Women Leaders Are: Not So Bound by Tradition, Nor Enamored with Power and the Trappings of Office; Outcome-Oriented, Very Caring, Can Do People, Take on Challenges Others Shun
Garmon (2001)	Practicing Humility, Picking Your Battles, Instilling a Sense of Pride, Trusting Your Intuition, Open, Honest, Accurate Communication, Good Dose Of Common Sense, Lots of Willingness to Trust, Constant Dedication to the Success of Students and Those Who Serve Students.
Giannini (2001)	Sees Women Leaders as Responsive Change Agents, and Guiding the Future Agendas of Higher Education.
Hockaday and Puyear (2000)	Vision; Integrity; Confidence; Courage; Technical Knowledge; Collaborators, Persistence; Good Judgment; and Desire To Lead.
McFarlin, Crittenden, and Ebbers (1999)	Possession of an Earned Doctorate Degree, Specific Study of Community College Leadership, Personal Research and Publication Agenda, Preparation as a Change Agent, Status as Community College Insider, Mentor-Protégé Relationship, Peer Networks, Leadership Development Activities, and Knowledge of Technology

Phelps, Taber, and Smith (1997)	Provide Inspiring Role Models for Students, Employees, And Community Residents; Important Voices To Dialogues Concerning Staff Development, Curriculum Changes, Teaching Excellence, and Student Success; Promote Community Relationships and Commitments, Enriching All Associated With The College And Its Community
Pielstick (1998)	Creating A Vision, Communicating The Vision, Building Relationships, Developing A Supporting Organizational Culture, Guiding Implementation, Exhibiting Character, And Achieving Results
Oakley and Krug (1994)	The reactive leader is oriented toward the problem and symptoms instead of discovering the cause of the problem. The creative leader is oriented on solutions that nurture ownership by the team members.
Stephenson (2001)	Challenges Woman Leaders To Understand Staffing, Students, Funding And The Workforce

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EFF-088 (Rev. 9/97)